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ABSTRACT

The Tennessee Career Ladder Program consists of a five-step classification system in which Level II teachers (who must have taught for 8 years) and Level III teachers (who must have taught for 12 years) are at the summit with the longest contracts and highest pay. This study surveyed 474 Level II and Level III teachers to determine the perceptions of these teachers concerning the effectiveness of the program. The findings of the study are reported in descriptive form by questionnaire item. The results indicated that the teachers believe the program will not necessarily improve education in-Tennessee. Also, they thought that the Career Ladder would not attract more qualified individuals into teaching. However, respondents reported that the program was an incentive to remain in the the teaching profession. Also, most agreed that the quality of instruction would be improved through the implementation of the program. A majority concluded that merit pay would cause morale problems among teachers. Many disagreed that the Career Ladder Program had a positive influence on the overall effectiveness of their school. A total of 70 percent of those responding stated that the Career Ladder Program should be continued. (JD)

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CAREER LADDER LEVEL II AND LEVEL III TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TENNESSEE CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

A Research Study Presented
at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting
of the Mid-South Educational Research
Association in Memphis, Tennessee
November 20, 1986

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CAREER LADDER LEVEL II AND LEVEL III
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE TENNESSEE CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee is among the several states that have implemented a "career ladder program." The Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 provides supplementary pay for teachers who participate in Tennessee's Career Ladder Program. The Career Ladder Program consists of a five-step classification system:

Probationary Teachers. First-year teachers who will receive state certification after a positive evaluation and a recommendation from their local school board.

Apprentice Teachers. After probation, teachers will serve a three-year apprenticeship and receive an annual supplement of $500 as an incentive to stay in the teacher profession. They will be evaluated each year by their local school boards. After completing the third year, they must receive tenure and move to the next level or lose their jobs.

Career Level I Teachers. Certification at this level lasts for five years, and teachers receive an annual supplement of $1,000. In addition to their usual duties, teachers will supervise student interns and probationary teachers. A teacher must have served three years as an apprentice teacher to qualify for Career Level I.

Career Level II Teachers. Certification at this level is for five years, and teachers are eligible for up to $4,000 annual salary supplements with 10-month and 11-month contracts. A teacher must have eight

years teaching experience to qualify for Level II.

Career Level III Teachers. Certification lasts five years, and the annual supplements are $3,000 for a 10-month contract, $5,000 for an 11-month contract, and $7,000 for a 12-month contract. Career Level III teachers are evaluated by evaluators employed by the Tennessee State Department of Education. A teacher must have taught for twelve years to qualify for Level III. (Public Chapter' No. 7, First Extraordinary Session of the 93rd General Assembly, State of Tennessee, as Amended by Chapter 829, Public Acts of 1984).

Some 39,000 teachers and school administrators are participating in the Tennessee Career Ladder Program. The focus of the program is to attract and hold high quality educators in Tennessee schools. Pay incentives for those who participate are provided through a three-tiered structure designated as Levels I, II, and III. Over 3,000 teachers have achieved levels II and III receiving salary supplement ranging from $4,000 to $7,000.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Differing attitudes concerning the Career Ladder Program exist among teachers in Tennessee. The opinions of those participating are important to program effectiveness and future development. This study was designed to measure the perceptions held by Career Level II and Career Level III teachers across Tennessee. These teachers represent those determined most competent in the state. Their unique insights should prove beneficial for the improvement of this program and education in general. The end result should be to assure that Tennessee's youth receive the best education possible.

PROCEDURES

A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 600 career level II and III teachers in Tennessee. This sample consisted of 200 teachers from each of the major geographic regions of the state. No attempt was made to distinguish between level II and III teachers in the interpretation of data. The return rate on the questionnaires was 79 percent (474 teachers).

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The findings of the study are reported in descriptive form by questionnaire item. Legend: SA - Strongly Agree; A - Agree; D - Disagree; SD - Strongly Disagree

1. The Career Ladder Program is an innovative effort to improve public education in Tennessee.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	87	201	142	44
Percent Responding	.18	.42	.30	.09

117.3080 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

2. The Career Ladder Program will attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	24	126	147	177
Percent Responding	.05	.26	.31	.37

111.5696 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

3. The Career Ladder Program is an incentive for educators to remain in the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	103	237	111	23
Percent Responding	.22	.50	.23	.05

197.9662 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

4. The implementation of the Career Ladder Program will improve the quality of instruction.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	119	251	92	12
Percent Responding	.25	.53	.19	.02

249.7975 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

5. Merit Pay (Levels II and III) will cause morale problems among individuals in the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	172	188	98	16
Percent Responding	.36	.40	.21	.03

157.1224 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

6. The career level II and III evaluation procedures have been professional and objective.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	132	127	181	34
Percent Responding	.28	.26	.38	.07

95.3671 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

7. The Career Ladder Program will improve education in Tennessee.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	15	232	215	12
Percent Responding	.03	.48	.45	.02

373.4093 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

8. Those teachers who have applied for career level status are the better teachers in my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	103	227	91	53
Percent Responding	.22	.48	.19	.11

143.9578 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

9. I am excited about my teaching career because of the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	73	193	203	5
Percent Responding	.15	.41	.43	.01

233.2743 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

10. Adequate information has been made available to me concerning the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	261	213	0	0
Percent Responding	.55	.45	0	0

483.7215 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

11. The Career Ladder Program has had a positive influence on the overall effectiveness of my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	40	140	198	96
Percent Responding	.08	.30	.42	.20

113.5105 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

12. I believe that parents understand and support the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	47	157	240	30
Percent Responding	.10	.33	.51	.06

246.3207 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

13. Teachers on career levels II and III (with increased salaries) should assume a proportionately greater share of school responsibilities.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	23	163	184	104
Percent Responding	.05	.34	.39	.22

131.6540 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

14. The Career Ladder Program has made me a better teacher.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	61	192	173	48
Percent Responding	.13	.41	.36	.10

140.4979 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

15. Teachers who have attained career levels II and III should help other teachers to become better teachers.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	101	366	7	0
Percent Responding	.21	.77	.01	0

742.9283 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

16. The Career Ladder Program has brought about improvements and revision in the curriculum in my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	54	133	211	76
Percent Responding	.11	.28	.44	.16

124.3291 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

17. Prospective teachers should be required to pass a competency examination (basic skills) before licensure by the state.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	95	241	126	12
Percent Responding	.20	.51	.26	.02

277.4852 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

18. Teachers should be required to pass tests periodically to measure knowledge and skills in their content area.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	38	157	164	115
Percent Responding	.08	.33	.34	.24

84.7679 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

19. Those who evaluate teachers should receive special training in teacher evaluation.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	211	263	0	0
Percent Responding	.45	.55	0	0

485.4093 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

20. The Career Ladder Program should be continued.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	186	146	107	35
Percent Responding	.39	.31	.22	.07

104.7848 Chi Square .0001 Sig.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers on Career Ladder levels II and III concerning the effectiveness of the Career Ladder Program. The findings of the study were reported in descriptive form by questionnaire item. The results of the study show that teachers believe that the Career Ladder Program will not necessarily improve education in Tennessee. Also, they thought that the Career Ladder would not attract more qualified individuals into teaching. However, respondents reported that the Career Ladder Program was an incentive to remain in the teaching profession. Also, most agreed that the quality of instruction will be improved through the implementation of the Career Ladder Program. A majority concluded that merit pay will cause morale problems among teachers. Many disagreed that the Career Ladder Program had a positive influence on the overall effectiveness of their school. A total of 70 percent of those responding stated that the Career Ladder Program should be continued.

The Career Ladder Program continues to generate considerable interest and discussion among educators, politicians, and the general public. It will be interesting to observe future developments in the program especially since a different political party will control the governor's office effective January 1987.

APPENDIX

EVALUATION OF CAREER LADDER PROGRAM

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1	2	3	4

____ The Career Ladder Program is an innovative effort to improve education in Tennessee.

____ The Career Ladder Program will attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession.

____ The Career Ladder Program is an incentive for educators to remain in the teaching profession.

____ The implementation of the Career Ladder Program will improve the quality of instruction.

____ Merit Pay (levels II and III) has caused morale problems among individuals in the teaching profession.

____ The career levels II and III evaluation procedures have been professional and objectives.

____ The Career Ladder Program will improve education in Tennessee.

____ Those teachers who have applied for career level status are the better teachers in my school.

____ I am excited about my teaching career under the Career Ladder Program.

____ Adequate information has been made available to me concerning the Career Ladder Program.

____ The Career Ladder Program has had a positive influence on the overall effectiveness of my school.

____ I believe that parents understand and support the Career Ladder Program.

____ Teachers on career levels II and III (with increased salaries) should assume a greater share of school responsibilities.

____ The Career Ladder Program has made me a better teacher.

____ Teachers who have attained career levels II and III should help other teachers become better teachers.

____ The Career Ladder Program has brought about improvements and revision in the curriculum in my school.

____ Prospective teachers should be required to pass a competency examination (basic skills) before licensure by the state.

____ Teachers should be required to pass tests periodically to measure knowledge and skills in their content area.

____ Those who evaluate teachers should receive special training in teacher evaluation.

____ The Career Ladder Program should be continued.